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WASHINGTON - Eighty-seven-year-old Wan No remembers the exact moment he was separated from his wife and two young sons: Dec. 11, 1950, at 1:30 p.m., as they tried to flee North Korea during heavy bombing.

Since then, the retired pastor has spent four decades in South Korea and 17 years in the United States, but he has had no news about his family stranded in the North when the country sealed itself off after the Korean War.

On Tuesday, two U.S. lawmakers said they will head a commission that will try to talk directly with North Korea on behalf of No and the estimated 100,000 other Korean-Americans who have family members living in the North. The goal, they say, is to urge reunions for people who, in some cases, have not seen their North Korean relatives for more than five decades.

Republican Rep. Mark Kirk of Illinois and Democratic Rep. Jim Matheson of Utah, standing beside No and Cha-hee Stanfield, 66, another Korean separated from her family, said time is running out for aging relatives waiting for news of their loved ones.

Kirk said he would go in September to North Korea's U.N. offices in New York City to try to present a list of Korean-American families who wanted to contact relatives in the North.

"We're ready to talk to North Korea at any time," Kirk said. "South Korean families should not be the only ones who see their relatives."

Thousands of Koreans have met their relatives since a landmark inter-Korean summit in 2000, when the leaders of the two rival Koreas agreed to move toward reconciliation and cooperation.

The U.S. has had rockier ties with Pyongyang, with Washington focusing on persuading the North to abandon its nuclear program. Progress has been seen recently in nuclear talks, however, with the North recently shutting down its nuclear reactor.

Kirk said the effort to reunite families could accompany nuclear negotiations. He also spoke of the money that families in the U.S. would likely send to their relatives in North Korea.

Millions of Korean families were separated following the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945 and the 1950-53 Korean War. There is no direct mail, telephone service or other form of communication between ordinary citizens across the border, as the two Koreas remain technically at war.